DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 361 689 CS 213 970

AUTHOR Sacco, Margaret T.
TITLE Enhancing Multicultural Literature by Using the Whole Language Approach in Diverse Settings while Facing the Censorship Challenge.
PUB DATE 18 Mar 93
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Spring Conference of the National Council of Teachers of English (Richmond, VA, March 18-20, 1993).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Reference Materials - Bibliographies (131) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adolescent Literature; *Censorship; Cultural Differences; Elementary Secondary Education; English Instruction; Higher Education; Literature Appreciation; *Multicultural Education; Reading Interests; *Whole Language Approach
IDENTIFIERS Ethnic Literature; Literary Canon

ABSTRACT

The whole language approach offers many opportunities for enhancing and effectively using multicultural literature in diverse settings. Recently many English teachers have been away from the traditional canon and including in their reading lists literature by writers who represent various ethnic and cultural groups. However, censorship has become a very strong threat to those teachers considering the use of multicultural literature in the classroom. Teachers can become paralyzed by the fear of censorship, thus preventing the opening up of the canon. Diversity strengthens and enriches a culture, however, so that readings concerning different ethnic and cultural perspectives should be encouraged. One excellent means of introducing such works into the curriculum is a whole language approach. Social studies students, for example, might read a novel concerning apartheid in South Africa. Teachers can promote the reading of such books by preparing "booktalks," short talks about books which entice readership. Through various means, teachers must strive to incorporate multicultural perspectives into their classrooms. (An annotated bibliography of 12 works of young adult fiction, all useful for teaching multicultural perspectives, is attached.) (HB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 361 689

Enhancing Multicultural Literature by Using the Whole Language Approach in Diverse Settings While Facing the Censorship Challenge

Presented to:

Spring Conference,
National Council of Teachers of English,
Richmond, Virginia
March 18, 1993

by

Margaret T. Sacco, Ph.D.
Department of Teacher Education
Miami University

CS213970

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Margaret Sacco

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

Enhancing Multicultural Literature by Using the Whole Language Approach in Diverse Settings While Facing the Censorship Challenge

The whole language approach offers many opportunities for enhancing and effectively using multicultural literature in diverse settings. In the following paragraphs there will be a brief discussion of multicultural literature, censorship, the whole language approach, and examples of booktalks of multicultural books.

It is becoming increasingly more important for English and language arts teachers to abandon the sacred cannon of classical literature and integrate meaningful, multicultural literature in the classroom. English teachers should realize that their classrooms are not composed of eighteenth century English students. Hispanics are becoming the largest minority in the United States yet too few curriculums explore the fiction and nonfiction of Chicanos. Young adult literature provides an opportunity for crossing cultural boundaries and connecting young people with the larger world of human experience because of the universality of the adolescent experience. Earlier Florence Crandall Means, a popular young adult novelist of the 1930's-50's, wrote novels for adolescents that challenged prejudices. Tangled Waters (1936), the story of a fifteen-year-old Navajo girl, was Means' first successful attempt at portraying a minority. Another Means novel, Shattered Windows (1938), was the first young adult novel to depict Blacks as dignified, respectable people. It was

unusual, particularly at that time for literature to portray Blacks favorably. Another courageous novel by Means, The Moved-Outers (1945), realistically depicted the disgraceful seizure of property and the internment of Japanese-Americans into concentration camps by the federal government during World War II.

Today Means would displease the censors and critics who are insisting that books written about minorities and/or ethnic people be written by writers of that group or culture. In other words, Pearl S. Buck should not have written The Good Earth because she was not Chinese. Ouida Sebestyne's Words by Heart which is a heart raking coming of age story of a young Black girl has been criticized because it was written by a white author. Authors of all colors and ethnic backgrounds should have the right to write about anyone or any group of people. On the other hand, teachers and publishers should be helping minority writers develop their voices and share their experiences.

Censorship prevents the use of multicultural literature in the classroom. Teachers are so afraid of possible censorship problems that they will not use multicultural literature. On one hand there are those parents who insist that their children read only about their people. And on the other hand, books depicting minorities are being attacked for being racist. For example, Bruce Brooks' The Moves Make the Man (1989) is being attacked for containing racial slurs. Brooks' novel is about a young Black athlete integrating an all white high school in the 1960's. Racism needs to be exposed not hidden. Literature can help teens need learn that name calling belittles the caller and hurts the feelings of the victims.

Diversity strengthens and enriches a culture. Stories of ethnic groups help build the self-esteem of young adults of these groups by providing

role models and helping youth achieve their identity. Ehle (1982) is her review of the literature concluded that young adults will develop the beginnings of increased tolerance for and the appreciation of the ways of life of people from other countries through reading and vicariously experiencing life from a different cultural perspective.

Multicultural studies across the curriculum are possible by employing the whole language approach. Social studies courses offer so many opportunities for integrating the fiction and nonfiction of many ethnic groups into the curriculum. For example, one of the best ways to learn about apartheid is to read Naomi Mitchison's Friends and Enemies. The protagonist, Petrus' struggle to leave his homeland of the Union of South Africa and endure hardships in Botswana are necessary after his brother is arrested and sentenced to ten years in prison for questioning apartheid will help readers understand why this unjust system must be abolished. Additionally, students can learn about the quickly disappearing Lapp culture and customs by reading Lee Kingman's The Secret Journey of the Silver Reindeer.

Promoting the reading of multicultural books can be accomplished by teaching students how to prepare slide/tape and/or silent booktalks instead of those dreadful book reports. Booktalks are short talks given to entice readers to read a book. Audiotape, videotape, or slides and a tape can be prepared as booktalks to motivate listeners and/or viewers to read the book. Therefore in the following section examples of written booktalks are given.

Additionally, other teaching methods can be found in Pamela and Iris Tiedt's Multicultural Teaching: A Handbook of Activities, Information and Resources, (1986) which provides a wealth of teaching suggestions.

BOOKTALKS OF MULTICULTURAL BOOKS

Anaya, Rudolfo A. Heart of Aztlan. Editorial Justa Publications, Inc., 1976.

When a Mexican family is forced to sell all of their property and move to America they face a tremendous period of readjustment. Clemente, the father and leader of the family, begins to lose his high status because he is unable to hold a job and support his family. In fact his wife becomes the leader of the family. This troubles Clemente greatly and he begins to spend his days drinking and hanging out in bars. During one of his drunken periods Clemente discovers that he is chosen to lead his people to a better way of life. With the assistance of a blind guitar player Clemente tries to accomplish his mission.

Crew, Linda. Children of the River. Delacorte Press, 1989.

Sundara is forced from her home in Cambodia during the war in 1975. She and her Aunt Soka's family sail to America to escape the wrath of the Khmer Rouge. Sundara leaves the security of her homeland with its traditions and learns survival in a new land and culture. She attends school in Oregon and meets Jonathan, an American boy who helps with loneliness until the arrival of her family in America. Sundara finds herself in conflict with the lifestyle of the American boy she loves and her Cambodian traditions. Will Sundara be able to live a new and different life in American without being ostracized by her family?

Hale, Janet Campbell. The Owl's Song. Bantam Books, 1974.

Billy White Hawk has decided to leave his home on the Benewah reservation in Idaho. His best friend has died, and his mother became fatally ill in an institution years ago. Now, as he leaves his drunken father alone, he discovers a new world with his half-sister. New rules apply in this California high school, and he must overcome stereotypes and loneliness while fighting the hatred of people around. Will Billy be able to stay the same person when everyone wants to change him? Will he be able to make it in the "white man's world?" To do these things, he must change from the awkward boy he was into the strong, proud young man he wants to be.

Kincaid, Jamaica. Annie John. Plume, 1985.

Annie John is growing and maturing into a young woman and her mother no longer dotes on her. Her mother treats Annie as a young lady and this causes confusion. Annie struggles to gain her mother's affection and devotion, but all her mother does is criticize Annie more. So Annie rebels against her mother and hates her. Annie becomes disobedient and lies, cheats, misbehaves in class in spite of her mother. Finally, Annie decides to leave her Caribbean home and go to England to begin a new life. Will Annie's relationship with her mother improve? Read Annie John.

Nhuong, Huynh Quang. The Land I Lost. Harper & Row, 1982.

Huynh Quang was born and grew up in the central highlands of Vietnam. His hamlet was located on a riverbank that was bordered by a jungle and a stretch of high mountains on the other side. His family was guarded by one of the most poisonous snakes in the area which even killed a burglar who was trying to break into their house. He had a pet water buffalo who helped him catch fish, till the soil and even scare off the monkeys who stole their crops at night. Huynh tells stories of "unfaithful birds," his grandmother the karate champ, and the crocodile with a stump tail. To learn and enjoy the tales of Huynh's childhood read The Land I Lost.

Paterson, Katherine. The Master Puppeteer. Harper & Row, 1975.

Life is tough for thirteen-year-old Jiro, the son of a puppet maker. There is no money and no food to eat, for it is a time of famine in the province. Then Jiro goes to the puppet theatre where he meets and impresses the master puppeteer, Yoshida, who offers him a job as a foot operator of the puppets. Hoping to be able to help his family, Jiro accepts, and moves into the Hanaza. While learning the art of puppetry, Jiro hears tales of Saburo, a Japanese version of Robin Hood. When Jiro realizes that Saburo is someone he knows Jiro finds himself caught up in a dangerous web of secrets.

Paulsen, Gary. Dogsong. Penquin Books, 1985.

The Eskimo Village was a modern place now. Men used guns and the snowmachine, not the dogs, sled, and bow and arrow as the ancient hunters had used. Oogruk's dogs were the only ones in the village and Russel, a fourteen year old boy, was the only one who could use them the ancient way, the right way. Russel, though a young man, went to Oogruk to learn what it was that he instinctively knew in his heart: that when he can live like an ancient, then he will have his own song, his own creed, his individuality, and his manhood. So Russel sets out by sled and dogs with bows and arrows as Oogruk had instructed him. Russel journeys north across the frozen Alaskan tundra haunted all the while by eerie dreams of an ancient hunter whose adventures parallel his own. Will Russel's dream meld with reality when he must kill a polar bear in the ancient way he's seen in a dream? Will Russel Suskitt's dream die on the frozen tundra? Read Dogsong to find out.

Staples, Suzanne Fisher. Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind. Alfred Knopf, 1989.

Twelve year old Shabanu is like most Muslin girls her age in Pakistan. A marriage for her has already been arranged and will take place in the next year. Unlike the others, including her own thirteen year old sister Phulan, Shabanu abhors the thoughts of marriage and the limitations that female adulthood will thrust upon her. Shabanu's future is altered with the unexpected death of his sister's groom. Phulan marries the young man to whom Shabanu has been promised and Shabanu must become the fourth wife of the elderly but rich brother of a powerful landlord. Will Shabanu sacrifice and respect her family's honor or follow her dream of independence?

Yep, Laurence. Child of the Owl. Dell, 1977.

Twelve-year-old Casey Young lives with her father Barney who moves from town to town from one slum apartment to another. Barney is a compulsive gambler but Casey loves him despite his problems. When her father is hospitalized after being mugged, Casey is sent to live with her wealthy uncle in San Francisco. Street wise Casey does not fit into her uncle's family so she goes to live with her grandmother, Paw Paw, in Chinatown. Casey remains an outsider in Chinatown because she does not speak or read Chinese. When her grandmother tells her the story of the

owl charm, Paw-Paw's prize possession, Casey learns her Chinese heritage and they form a bond. This story sustains Casey when she discovers that her father is living in San Francisco and has not come to get her. Paw-Paw is hurt when the owl charm is stolen and Casey tries to retrieve the charm to preserve their heritage.

Yep, Laurence. Dragon of the Lost Sea. Harper Trophy, 1982.

Are you looking for an adventure? Neither was Thorn until he met Shimmer, the dragon of the lost sea. Will Thorn be able to acquire courage or is he a useless orphan? Is Shimmer really a princess or an obnoxious outlaw? Together can Shimmer and Thorn capture the evil Civet and return the sea to Shimmer's homeland?

Yep, Laurence. Dragonwings. Harper Trophy, 1975.

Moon Shadow is an eight-year-old Chinese boy who comes to America, the land of the Golden Mountain, to live with his father whom he has never seen. Once in America Moon Shadow has to adapt to a new way of life, and deal with problems facing both American and Chinese people in the early 1900's. He develops a strong relationship with his father, Windrider, that is tested throughout the story. His father believes that he was a dragon in a prior life and that God will restore his dragon-like powers and allow him once again to soar above the clouds if he remains honorable and humble in his present life in spite of all the prejudices against him and his people. In order to be restored to his dragon-like powers Windrider and White Shadow attempt to build a flying machine.

Yep, Laurence. The Star Fisher. Puffin Books, 1992.

In 1927 Joan Lee, her mom and dad, and brother and sister move to Clarksburg, West Virginia from Ohio to start a new laundry. Two men write "Go Home" on the fence in front of their house. Joan feels trapped. Her parents' laundry is slow to start. At school Joan must eat lettuce sandwiches for lunch and a classmate remarks that her skin is "a little dark." Despite all her problems, Joan fishes for a few stars.